

Opinion of the Court.

WESTERN UNION TELEGRAPH COMPANY v.  
BOEGLI.

ERROR TO THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF INDIANA.

No. 83. Submitted December 19, 1919.—Decided January 12, 1920.

An act of Congress regulating a subject of interstate commerce is not to be narrowly construed for the purpose of preserving the state power over the same subject previously enjoyed in the absence of federal legislation. P. 316.

The Act of June 18, 1910, c. 309, 36 Stat. 545, brought telegraph companies under the Act to Regulate Commerce and under the administrative control of the Interstate Commerce Commission, and so subjected such companies to a uniform national rule, incompatible with a power in the States to inflict penalties for failure to make prompt delivery of interstate messages. *Id. Postal Telegraph-Cable Co. v. Warren-Godwin Lumber Co., ante*, 27. 187 Indiana, 238, reversed.

THE case is stated in the opinion.

*Mr. Rush Taggart and Mr. Francis Raymond Stark* for plaintiff in error.

*Mr. Arthur W. Parry* for defendant in error.

MR. CHIEF JUSTICE WHITE delivered the opinion of the court.

The Telegraph Company challenged the right to subject it to a penalty fixed by a law of Indiana for failure to deliver promptly in that State a telegram sent there from a point in Illinois, on the ground that the Act of Congress of June 18, 1910, amending the Act to Regulate Commerce (36 Stat. 539, 545), had deprived the State of all power in the premises. The court conceding that if the act of Con-

Opinion of the Court.

251 U. S.

gress dealt with the subject the state statute would be inoperative, imposed the penalty on the ground that the Act of 1910 did not extend to that field. The correctness of this conclusion is the one controversy with which the arguments are concerned.

The proposition that the Act of 1910 must be narrowly construed so as to preserve the reserved power of the State over the subject in hand, although it is admitted that that power is in its nature federal and may be exercised by the State only because of nonaction by Congress, is obviously too conflicting and unsound to require further notice. We therefore consider the statute in the light of its text and, if there be ambiguity, of its context, in order to give effect to the intent of Congress as manifested in its enactment.

As the result of doing so, we are of opinion that the provisions of the statute bringing telegraph companies under the Act to Regulate Commerce as well as placing them under the administrative control of the Interstate Commerce Commission so clearly establish the purpose of Congress to subject such companies to a uniform national rule as to cause it to be certain that there was no room thereafter for the exercise by the several States of power to regulate, by penalizing the negligent failure to deliver promptly an interstate telegram, and that the court below erred therefore in imposing the penalty fixed by the state statute.

We do not pursue the subject further since the effect of the Act of 1910 in taking possession of the field was recently determined in exact accordance with the conclusion we have just stated. *Postal Telegraph-Cable Co. v. Warren-Godwin Lumber Co.*, *ante*, 27. That case, indeed, was concerned only with the operation, after the passage of the Act of 1910, of a state statute rendering illegal a clause of a contract for sending an interstate telegram limiting the amount of recovery under the conditions stated in case of an unrepeated message; but the

315.

## Syllabus.

ruling that the effect of the Act of 1910 was to exclude the possibility thereafter of applying the state law was rested, not alone upon the special provisions of the Act of 1910 relating to unrepeated messages, but upon the necessary effect of the general provisions of that act bringing telegraph companies under the control of the Interstate Commerce Act. The contention as to the continuance of state power here made is therefore adversely foreclosed. Indeed, in the previous case the principal authorities here relied upon to sustain the continued right to exert state power after the passage of the Act of 1910 were disapproved and various decisions of state courts of last resort to the contrary, one or more dealing with the subject now in hand, were approvingly cited.

Reversed and remanded for further proceedings not inconsistent with this opinion.

*Reversed.*

---